

NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

"One interest will prevail . . . Christ our righteousness."

September/October 2008



THE FAITH OF JESUS

How to Prepare for the Final Showdown

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Current and Future Challenges

by Bill Brace

It is election season and time for Armageddon rumors to abound within the Seventh-day Adventist community of faith. A long-time friend of mine who is serving the Lord in a distant land sent me, via email (isn't the Internet wonderful?), a couple of "whoppers" in the past month or two. With all due respect to the original, sincere source of the rumors, if one were to take them seriously, he or she might be tempted to commit hari-kari or head for the hills and attempt to hide from the infrared capabilities of sinister government officials.

While I do not want to belittle our great heritage of prophetic interpretation, a minority among us have become almost as preposterous in their projections as some of our dispensationalist friends. The question is: how do these things happen?

Couple the above concern with another one that comes to me via the Adventist Internet grapevine. Currently, there is a hot social topic that has threatened to divide several denominations, including ones which for generations and centuries stood steadfast upon the sanctity and authority of scripture. Such commitment to the Word of God, unfortunately, has now eroded within their ranks, and that explains why they find themselves in such a compromising position, both in a theological and practical sense.

Given time, such matters eventually make their way to the doorstep of Seventh-day Adventism. Without a doubt our beloved Church will not be divinely protected from the confrontation of all that is, at one time or other, an issue in the religious world. (To have it not thus so would be a vindication of the charges

pronounced by Satan in the controversy between God and himself.)

As I read with sadness the rationale utilized for the possible acceptance of this practice within our ranks, I note that, once again at bottom line, it has been founded upon a depreciation of the authority of God's word. One sympathetic correspondent, for example, suggested that writers in Old Testament times did not have the knowledge that we, the sophisticatedly educated ones, possess today on the matter. Hard to believe that someone could conclude that modern man is a higher authority than those who were inspired by the Holy Spirit! May God, ever so gently, humble us of our self-absorbing conceit!

These prophetic and social issues, mentioned above, along with others we know not of at the moment, will be sure to increase as we near the conclusion of the conflict between the two heavyweights of the supernatural realm. We have been warned that "every wind of doctrine" will be presented to us. What we see now is a partial fulfillment of that inspired prediction. In light of these monumental questions and issues are we, as pastors, prepared "to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15)? Be assured, it will not become easier. The problems of our pastoral forefathers will seem "minor league" compared to what lies ahead.

I am intrigued and sobered by the statements of Ellen White as they relate to her counsel regarding the coming "biggie"—the Omega of apostasy. As you well know, there has been speculation for generations as to what constitutes the Omega. Space does not allow me to add

my voice to what possibly it could be; and, in all fairness, my convictions at this time would be speculative as well. Suffice to say, the servant of the Lord was deeply concerned for the last generation's confrontation with the seductive and enticing wiles of the devil. Here are a few of her words as a reminder: "The omega will be of a most startling nature."¹ "I knew that the omega would follow . . . and I trembled for our people."² Sobering words, indeed!

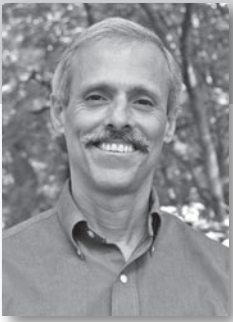
It is my humble conviction that we pastors have a deep need to ask God to give us a hunger and a thirst for righteousness so that we, in turn, will be able to guide the footsteps of our parishioners in the righteous pathway at this crucial time. So let's beg our willing Lord for fresh bread every day. Last week's bread, even yesterday's bread, becomes stale in a hurry. The times, an era of increasing confusion, compel us to seek that daily, divine manna.

(Endnotes)

¹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), 197.

² *Ibid.*, 203.

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The Faith of Jesus *by Steven Grabiner*

*M*artial law

imposed by the president to prevent the national elections.” “Total failure of all US

banks. The imminent collapse of all state governments.” “The death of millions orchestrated by the US government. Millions more are to be rounded up into concentration camps.” “Only months left before the ‘little time of trouble.’ ” These and other scenarios are currently making their way around the Internet. Some of them have even found their way into the preaching of sincere Adventist pastors and laity. These preachers believe that they are giving the trumpet a certain sound and are motivating people to prepare for the coming of Christ. Undoubtedly, such a preparation is essential. We are living in the final moments of history. God’s people do need a radical preparation. Yet, it is legitimate to ask, is this the way to prepare? Is such excitement and speculation necessary, or has God already provided a better way?

Located firmly in the midst of the thematic and structural heart of Revelation are the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. Life-changing, demanding, complacency-shattering, priority-reorganizing, their call continues to echo. They are the reason the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists. They contain vital truths that will affect the destiny of those living in earth’s final hours. In phrases packed with meaning, they contain seeds of thought that mature into a complete warning, fully relevant for today.

Beginning with the everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6), these messages are driven by a momentum that carries the reader along to its ultimate conclusion. Moving through calls to fear, glorify, and worship God; warning us of a final judgment, the fall of Babylon, and the mark of the beast, the messages finally come to rest in an appeal to respond. Unfortunately, the ultimate aim of this passage too frequently goes unnoticed. Or at least the import behind the aim is not fully recognized. That aim is prepare a people to live to see Jesus Christ return.

In the words “Here is the patience of the saints, here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12, KJV) is an exhortation to apply and appropriate the three angels’ messages. John’s words “Here is” demand attention and stress a special emphasis.¹ He is creating an awareness of the importance of what follows. This verse can rightly be viewed as “the take home message”² of the center of Revelation (Rev 12-14). The three angels’ messages are set in the context of the final conflict. Their call is God’s response to Satan’s three-fold attack found in Revelation 13. Their purpose is to form a people who are no longer enchanted with or deceived by Satan’s counterfeits. They are not afraid of the future because they follow the one who knows the future.

This purpose of preparing a people is one of the over-arching concerns of Revelation. Woven throughout the book is a thread that connects those who have appropriated the message with those who are now called to do so. Faithfulness to the “word of God and testimony of Jesus” was evidenced in John’s life (Rev 1:9). It is a characteristic of those who partake in the first resurrection (Rev 20:4). It is a quality held by those who were killed for their faith (Rev 6:9-11). The aim of Revelation 14:6-11 is to once again form such a people who evidence such faith.

These people will be prepared for earth’s final events. They will be prepared for the final attacks of Satan and his “all-out” war against God’s people (Rev 12:17). They will be prepared for scenes far worse than those circulating around the Internet today. John sees them and describes them. They are portrayed in concise terms—those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

This relationship between the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus needs further exploration, especially in light of its setting. When we read Revelation through, it becomes clear that the main theme is the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. While Satan makes war with those who “keep God’s commandments and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev

12:17), his ultimate attack is upon God’s government (Rev 12:9). By attacking those who treasure God’s commandments, Satan is ultimately continuing his efforts to overthrow the divine government. Thus, in a special way, those brought to view in Revelation 14:12 have a unique role in this conflict. They withstand all the troubles and trials that are thrown against them. Their allegiance to the divine government remains firm, as evidenced by the fact that they “keep” God’s commandments.

The semantic range of the word “keep” has a broader compass than usually given to it. There are three distinct categories of meaning, each nuanced in its own way. They are “to guard” (with the idea of taking care of or watching over); “to keep” (or to preserve); and “to obey” (with the connotation of persisting in obedience or holding fast). Unquestionably, each nuance can be applied in this setting. In the midst of the final conflict over God’s government, His people will seek to preserve His law, cherish it, guard it, and clearly persist in obeying it, despite threats of

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death and economic boycott. Their obedience will not merely be a formal or external one. It will be an obedience that springs from the heart. Their motivation and perseverance will not be found in the latest current event, but will be anchored in “the faith of Jesus.”

It is that “faith of Jesus” that is both the power and the inspiration for God’s people. Unfortunately, it is too true that as Adventist pastors, we have inadequately communicated and demonstrated the life-changing force of “the faith of Jesus.” Ellen G. White wrote from Denver, Colorado, in 1889, that we have “only casually lifted up Christ as the sin-pardoning Saviour. . . . The faith of Jesus is not comprehended.”³ What does it mean to “comprehend” the faith of Jesus? How should this phrase be understood?⁴

The phrase is found in Bible translations in three different ways. For example, there is the KJV’s “faith of Jesus,” the NASB’s “faith in Jesus,” and the NIV’s “faithful to Jesus.” In wanting to more fully comprehend the expression, there are two main questions that demand answering. First, should the genitive construction (“of”) be understood as objective or subjective? That is, is Jesus the *object of faith*, which in English would be expressed by “faith in Jesus”? Or is it subjective, John discussing the *faith that belongs to Jesus*, that He demonstrated both in His Father, and toward those who are the objects of His love? The choice of the subjective has more weight, given that the “commandments” are clearly God’s (subjective) and that the parallel nature of the phrase would support a subjective reading for “the faith of Jesus.” Similarly, the “testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17) is best understood as originating in Jesus, not simply being about Him. It also is a subjective genitive. Thus, this points to “the faith of Jesus” as a subjective as well.

Second, should the Greek *pistis* be translated as faith or faithfulness? Both find support in different translations and both are within the semantic meaning of the word. If faithfulness is chosen, this gives rise to an alternative understanding, which is not found in any translations. The verse could be read as “those who keep [*cherish, preserve*] the

The way to prepare others is startlingly simple. Lift up Christ, in word, in life, and in action.

commandments of God, and the *faithfulness of Jesus*.”

This choice is strengthened by the overall tenor of Revelation. Jesus is frequently described as One who is Faithful (Rev 1:5; 3:14; 19:11). Within the larger concern of Revelation, Jesus is revealed as the One who answers the issues raised in the great controversy. When the heavenly council is confronted with no one in heaven or earth that can respond to questions about God’s government (Rev 5:1-3), Jesus is brought forth as the answer (Rev 5:5, 6). He responds to Satan’s accusations through His own self-sacrifice and by His faithfulness to God. He preserved this faithfulness despite feeling forsaken by God. While Satan raises questions about God’s faithfulness and the certainty of God’s promises, Jesus refutes those questions with the demonstration of His own life. Read this way, the verse is saying that God’s people will find *their fidelity* to God made possible only through *Christ’s faithfulness*.

Whether one finds merit in this way of reading the verse or not, it is certain that the focus of attention for God’s people needs to be centered in Jesus Christ. “It should be the burden of every messenger to set forth the fullness of Christ.”⁵ It is an absence of a practical application of Christ’s righteousness that causes the state of lukewarmness and lack of dedication prevalent today.

“What constitutes the faith of Jesus, that belongs to the third angel’s message? Jesus becoming our sin-bearer that He might become our sin-pardoning Saviour. . . . He came to our world and took our sins that we might take His righteousness. Faith in the ability of Christ to save us amply and fully and entirely is the faith of Jesus.”⁶ An experiential understanding of Christ’s sacrifice and the transformation He is longing to accomplish in our hearts will be the agency to prepare a people to live to see Jesus come. The way to prepare others is startlingly simple. Lift up Christ, in word, in life, and in action.

“The preaching of Christ crucified has been strangely neglected by our people. . . . It is this neglected part of the ministry which will be found the great instrument in the conversion of souls and in leading to the high standard of holiness which every church needs in order to become a living church.”⁷

Here is the power to transform lives.

(Endnotes)

¹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 798.

² Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), 160.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 430.

⁴ For a fuller discussion of the following ideas, see Tonstad, 166-194.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 186.

⁶ *Idem.*, 1888 *Materials*, 218.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 843.

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Babylon and Present Truth

by Pamela Kennedy

In a conversation with friends recently, the subject of “present truth”

came up. I couldn’t help wondering just what that means in today’s religious environment. Is it an ideal that has always existed and is only now coming to the fore, or is it something more tangible, a set of doctrines perhaps, a day even, or a “mark” in the forehead or the hand? Certainly it isn’t the sacrificial system enjoined upon Adam and his descendants, or the circumcision imposed on Abraham, both of which Paul declared obsolete at the cross. So what exactly is it that Bible-believing Christians are to regard as preeminently sacred these days? What is the “everlasting gospel” that is to lighten the earth with God’s “glory” or character of love?

Is it the importance of the fourth commandment? Is it the identity of the 666 beast? Is it that Sunday-keepers, as children of the Great Whore, are doomed to hell? Or is it that “Babylon has fallen” and God’s people are instructed to come out of her? If the latter, what exactly is the Babylon that God’s people are to come out of, and how is this “good news,” let alone “everlasting?”

Nearly twenty years ago, I had the unique privilege of hearing what a young lay preacher named Jim Arrabito had to say on the subject of Babylon. Travelling the world to document the origin and progression of Satan’s counterfeit system of worship, he photographed extensively the relics and artwork of religious and civic edifices, monuments, and museums, tracing their influence on Christianity through their common symbols. In so doing, he showed beyond question, confirming his data with excerpts from

their own writings, how secret societies and religious bodies, both pagan and Christian, have kept sun-worship alive and intact within the structures and rituals of their various organizations.

From Ham and his immediate progeny to the present, the father of lies has used this complex system of symbols for the dual purpose of (1) overriding the confusion of language at the tower of Babel and (2) keeping his malevolent purposes hidden through inner circles of initiation. Babylon, therefore, derived from “bab,” “el” and “on,” or “gate of the sun-god,” has always been the worship of Satan, a system of attitude and belief which God’s people are instructed to “come out of.” But even so, do we know what “come out of” means? Is our warfare over pagan iconography with its traditions and ritualistic behavior, or is it a far more pervasive war of the will? Is “present truth,” as Adventists understand it, a set of doctrines that fly in the face of sun-worship, or is it a Person in whose “image” God’s people are called to be conformed?

It seems clear that, however important doctrines and commandments may appear, the question of how to comply is more important still. If Christian righteousness requires a standard exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees, who kept the letter of the law with scrupulous attention to detail, then surely we must seek a better method of keeping it or be as hopelessly lost as they. It is here that the heart of the Adventist message rests. How are God’s people to keep His law, or any of the requirements exercised upon His children, unless God keeps it for us and through us, just as He kept it for and through Christ when He walked the earth as our example?

The “gospel,” everlasting or otherwise, as I have come to understand

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it, is not merely that Jesus lived my life and paid my debt, but that He was raised in the same “newness of life” that I must appropriate if I am to be “conformed to His image.”

It is a “newness of life” that the gospel encourages, wonderful news that the remnant may confidently shout from the rooftops, the news that Christ desires to dwell in us in order that we might perfectly reflect His character of selfless love (see Matt 5:48; Col 1:27). It is only as Christ indwells us, as God indwelt Him, that we can ever possess the standard of holiness that heaven requires. And it is by this exceeding great and precious promise that Christ will actually come in and fill us with Himself so that we become partakers of

the divine nature (see 2 Pet 1:4). Notice the following statements:

- “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but *Christ liveth in me*” (Gal 2:20).¹
- “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the *faith of the Son of God*” (Gal 2:20).
- “This mystery among the Gentiles . . . is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27).
- “That they also may be one in Us” (John 17:21).
- “*I in them*, and Thou in Me, *that they may be made perfect in one*” (John 17:23).
- “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the *Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*” (1 Cor 3:16).
- “Hold fast the form of sound words . . . *in faith and love . . . by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us*” (2 Tim 1:13-14).
- “If we love one another, God dwelleth *in us*, and His love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12).
- “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God *in him*” (1 John 4:16).
- “For the *truth’s sake*, which *dwelleth in us*, and shall be with us *for ever*” (2 John 1:2).

Such statements can hardly be misunderstood. And from these statements it seems clear that the “truth . . . which dwelleth in us . . . for ever” is the “everlasting gospel,” the exhilarating news of God’s life-changing power to become like Him in thought, word, and deed. As the great I AM has always existed in the present, so has His character. And as God’s people willingly pick up their cross and die to self, so they, like Christ, may be filled with His love to the fullest extent (see Col 2:9). This is the only standard that can live without a mediator when probation closes, and it is the unequivocal and

blatant difference between the character of Babylon and the character of God.

“Present truth,” therefore, is neither a list of rules nor a standard of worship for, in a world of religious factions,

Cor 5:20-21). It is only this beautiful spirit of sacrificial love that can grasp the meaning of the song of Moses and the Lamb (see Rev 15:3). And it is only this love that is able to witness first-

It is only those who fully reflect the selfless love of God, “Christ and Him crucified,” that will be found fit to occupy his throne

whose word can be trusted? Even the angels in heaven had difficulty with that decision as earth’s history abundantly demonstrates. “Present truth,” as I see it, is a universal principle, God’s self-sacrificing love as it was lived out in the person of His Son and as He desires to live it out in those who choose to be like Him. As Christ’s Spirit indwells us, so may we reflect His goodness, mercy, and faith. It is, after all, the faith of Jesus, Christ’s own faith, that is the distinguishing feature of God’s end-time people, which faith will not only enable them, but compel them to keep His commandments perfectly (see Rev 14:12).

Denominationalism can debate ideas till Doom’s Day, and belief systems can fight amongst themselves till Christ’s return proves them all wrong, for Christianity is the epitome of 1 Corinthians 13, which states categorically that without love even the most accurate of facts is a lie. It is only those who fully reflect the selfless love of God, “Christ and Him crucified,” that will be found fit to occupy his throne (see Matt 19:28; Rev 3:21), fit to be adopted into the Godhead (see Rom 8:15; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:15) and fit to be ambassadors to the universe (see 2

hand what God is really like.

Any attitude that fails to reflect the love of God has always been Babylon, the “gate of the sun-god,” the very entrance to Satan himself. Any sharp word, any disdainful thought, any lack of faith, any lack of love testifies to Satan’s control over the life. Conversely, any forgiveness under hurt, any love in the face of cruelty, any kindness in an act of hatred, or gentleness in response to anger, has always been “present truth.” It is Christ’s indwelling presence that is our only hope of character change. When He moves in, Truth goes from fact to reality, love becomes an unconscious breath, righteousness an accomplished fact, and the gospel a compelling allure—ever present, ever thrilling, everlasting.

(Endnotes)

¹ All scriptures are taken from the *King James Version*.

Pam Kennedy is a native of Tryon, North Carolina. Teacher, chiropractor, mother, and grandmother, she divides her time between the mountains of New Hampshire and the foothills of the Carolinas. In addition to writing, she enjoys gardening, and she is eager about the soon return of Christ.



The View from the Pew *by Kristin McGuire*

*A*s I

wheeled my grocery cart around a produce display on a recent trip to the grocery

store, my eyes fell upon the spectacle of a woman lying motionless on the floor. I gasped, surprised to happen upon such an unexpected scenario that nobody else knew about. Upon further investigation, it appeared that she had had a dizzy spell and grabbed the newspaper rack for support to keep herself from falling, but the newspapers weren't heavy enough, and the whole rack had spilled with her. I imagined that that is what happened. Whether she hit her head or lost consciousness for some other reason I knew not, so, being the first observer, I called 9-1-1. Soon, she was surrounded by a bustle of rescue activity and was whisked off to Maine Medical Center where she remained in the I.C.U. for several days.

Later, as I pondered the incident over and over, I remembered the look of fear on the face of the woman's father, who was there, as he took in the unexpected scenario. Death was a very real possibility. I guess you could say he was experiencing the fear of death (his daughter's). Then I got to thinking about what the Bible says about the fear of death. (I am one of those persons who has a song or a Bible verse for everything.) According to Hebrews 2:14 and 15, fear of death causes us to be subject to or in danger of bondage. But we are called to liberty and should not be entangled with the yoke of bondage,

according to Galatians 5:1 and 13. Clearly, then, bondage is not what Christ has in mind for us. He came to give us life—and that more abundantly (see John 10:10).

So how can we preserve ourselves from such entanglement? The best remedy for fear of death is this: you must believe that Christ's death was your death. Then, once you are dead, you don't have to be afraid to die. Right there in Colossians 3:3, it says that you are dead. The question, then, is this: how do you live when you are dead? The answer is in 2 Corinthians 5:14: "The love of Christ constraineth us."¹

Three things pop out at me when I look up "constrain" in my Bible dictionary. The first is the phrase "contrary to nature." The force that constrains us is agape love, and that is contrary to our own sinful human nature. In other words, it does not come as standard equipment. It is a gift from heaven. The second word that stands out is "alongside." It just so happens that the Greek word for Comforter is *parakletos*, which means "called to one's side." And the third phrase that stands out under constrain is "to hold together." Putting it all together, God sends us the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, to come alongside us so that we might be constrained by His agape to live a life that is contrary to our nature. And that is how we live when we are dead. But there is just one more factor involved: the holding together part.

I recently saw Louie Giglio's DVD *How Great is our God*. In it he showed the molecular structure of laminin, the stuff that holds our cells together. It is

in the shape of a cross! First he showed a diagram of it, and it was pretty awe-inspiring, but when he showed an actual photograph of the thing, my heart was strangely warmed. While maintaining the distinct image of the cross, it was all kind of gnarly and bent-looking. Then he read the text, "In Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17, RSV), and I literally felt my insides heave. Our God put within us millions of little gnarly crosses to hold our cells together! The cross is where justice and mercy meet, where sinful human flesh meets with the Holy God and gets restored to His image, and where all the inhabitants of the galaxies will find once and for all that God indeed is love. This is what holds us together. This is what holds the universe together.

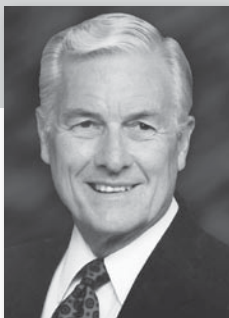
And this is how we live when we are dead!

(Endnotes)

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptures are taken from the *King James Version*.

Kristin McGuire writes from Topsham, Maine. She lives there with her husband, Norman, and their four children, Tim, Becky, Shawn, and Gavin. Before becoming active in the local church in music ministry and Sabbath School work, she served in full-time restaurant evangelism for four years and Bible work for three years after that. In 1984 she both graduated from Purdue University with a BS in General Management/Marketing and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She enjoys tennis, as well as cooking, walking, reading, and writing.

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The Investigative Judgment: Is it Biblical? – Part 1

by Herbert E. Douglas

The subject of the Investigative Judgment is timely, personal, and perhaps the most urgent that men

and women can think about today. But in the interest of being brief, let's lay out fundamental axioms:

- God doesn't close our individual probation—we do. God's gracious promises are always on the table, His front door is always open, His light is always on: "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). To be perfectly clear, men and women who are making a habit of saying "No" to the Spirit, who stubbornly resist whatever light of Truth they have, *they are closing their own probation. Not God!*
- Therefore, as far as the living are concerned, the Investigative Judgment is not focused on angels, or even God, turning pages but on the maturing of a person's life. Only one question: *Is that person maturing into one who can be trusted with eternal life?*
- God the Father is not the Judge "for the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22, 27-30). "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17).
- If Jesus is not the frowning Judge so often seen in medieval art, how, then, does He do His job of saving the world (which is His way of "judging" the world)? By bringing light "to every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9), by revealing truth in some way to everyone on which moral decisions are made. Thus, *those who reject this light are condemning (judging) themselves* (John 3:18-21).

- Contrary to some notions of the past few years, Christ's record does not stand in place of our records when our names come up in the Investigative Judgment.
- We are not to be saved by our works, but our works surely will judge us: "They were judged each one according to his works" (Revelation 20:13). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). "For the Son of man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then He will reward each according to his works" (Matthew 16:27). The redeemed will be more than admirers of Jesus; they will be His followers who are determined to overcome evil even as He had overcome (Revelation 3:21).

The whole point of the gospel is to restore men and women to the place where they can be trusted to say "Yes" to God's will as forever examples of divine-human cooperation.¹

How are we measured?

Basic biblical premise is that no one "deserves" salvation. Or putting it another way, we can not in any way "earn" eternal life. Hardly! The righteousness of Christ alone provides our "title" to heaven, and our "fitness" for heaven is made possible by His grace that supplies the power to overcome all self-serving; otherwise, none of us could be trusted with eternal life.

The Investigative Judgment separates those who have claimed the Lord's name but not His character (Matthew 7:21-23) from those who have seriously and genuinely accepted the way of the Cross, and like Paul, "die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31) to all self-centered, self-glorifying desires. Further, the issue is not who has absolute perfection but who has, with the time lived, given the angels, the unfallen

worlds, and God Himself, a trajectory of what his or her life would be if time were to be continued. This kind of genuine faith describes the thief on the Cross as well as that of Enoch. That spread of experience will include every one of us!

These biblical fundamentals will help us understand what has been going on in heaven during the Investigative Judgment.

- The judgment books (Revelation 20:12) record our choices, whether we are becoming more like Jesus or more like His adversary, the devil. The Bible uses various analogies, such as sheep and goats (Matthew 25:32, 33), wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30) and the seal of God and the mark of the beast (Revelation 7:3; 13:16, 17; 14:9). How these records are kept are beyond our imagination. However, with modern computer

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memory systems, with trillions of computations performed virtually simultaneously, we get a faint idea of how the mind of God “records” the DNA and, thus, character configuration of everyone who has ever lived. Then when we think of the marvels of modern DVD or video recordings and storage, we get further glimpses of how any episode since creation can be replayed instantly. Nothing will be subject to guesswork. As Jesus said, “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 13:37).²

- Jesus does not arbitrarily balance out one’s good deeds and bad deeds in determining one’s eternal future. One’s future is determined by whether a person’s character is becoming safe to save or not, whether his or her life trajectory shows a person who, if time were given, could be trusted with eternal life. As Ellen White writes:

“The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.”³

- Adventists do believe that sins are forgiven when they are confessed and forsaken. Adventists don’t wait until the Investigative Judgment to know with certainty that their sins are covered by the mercies of Jesus. Further, they rejoice with New Testament writers who describe Christ’s atoning (or, reconciling) work as twofold: not only for Christ’s forgiveness but also for His “cleansing” (Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9). “Cleansing” is John’s word for “grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).
- Jesus has done this wonderful ministry of forgiveness and cleansing (empowering) since He ascended to heaven. But since 1844, He has added a new phase to His work as our Mediator. In addition to His two-fold ministry since the Cross (grace of pardon and the grace of power), the Investigative Judgment is now concerned with the judgment of character and the preparation of a people to meet Him at the Second Advent.

In Part Two, we will focus on what has been going on in heaven since 1844 where the Investigative Judgment has been in session.

(Endnotes)

¹ “Those who refuse to cooperate with God on earth would not cooperate with Him in heaven. It would not be safe to take them to heaven.” Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1900), 280.

² “In the book of God’s remembrance every deed of righteousness is immortalized. There every temptation resisted, every evil overcome, every word of tender pity expressed, is faithfully chronicled. And every act of sacrifice, every suffering and sorrow endured for Christ’s sake, is recorded . . . There is a record also of the sins of men. . . . The secret purposes and motives appear in the unerring register; for God ‘will bring

to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.’ 1 Corinthians 4:5. . . . Every man’s work passes in review before God and is registered for faithfulness or unfaithfulness. Opposite each name in the books of heaven is entered with terrible exactness every wrong word, every selfish act, every unfulfilled duty, and every secret sin, with every artful dissembling. Heaven-sent warnings or reproofs neglected, wasted moments, unimproved opportunities, the influence exerted for good or for evil, with its far-reaching results, all are chronicled by the recording angel.” *Idem.*, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1911), 481, 482.

³ *Idem.*, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1892), 57, 58. Notice also what she writes in *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 315, 317, 319: “When those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God’s commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. . . . They have a right to join the blood-washed throng. . . . He expects us to overcome in His name. Those who reject the gift of Christ’s righteousness are rejecting the attributes of character which would constitute them the sons and daughters of God. They are rejecting that which alone could give them a fitness for a place at the marriage feast. . . . There will be no future probation in which to prepare for eternity. It is in this life that we are to put on the robe of Christ’s righteousness. This is our only opportunity to form characters for the home which Christ has made ready for those who obey His commandments.”

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Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary—Part 2

by John McVay

This article is Part 2 of a two-part series. Part 1 was in the July/August 2008 issue, also available at www.newenglandpastor.com. The article was originally presented as a sermon at the Questions on Doctrine 50th Anniversary Conference, held at Andrews University, October 24-27, 2007.

—Editors

The block and tackle is an amazing machine—an assemblage of pulleys and ropes that enables mere mortals to do wondrous feats. It was invented clear back in the 3rd Century B.C. by that great Scottish scientist-philosopher-engineer, Archimedes (Well, O.K., so he wasn't Scottish. Few people can be. He was Greek. But he was so brilliant he deserved to be Scottish!) Can you imagine that first day—aboard a Greek trading ship—when Archimedes introduces his newfangled contraption, the block and tackle?

I don't know just how he did it, but I know how I would have. I would have carefully tested the limits of the machine in advance. And then I would have had the longshoremen stack up a large pile of cargo in the middle of a strong net. Then I would attach a rope to the top of it, sling it across a support and say to ten men, making sure there were a couple of obvious weaklings among them, "Pick it up!" They grunt and heave and are unable to even budge the load. Then, with considerable pomp, I install the block and tackle. Having fussed over it a great deal, I point to one of those weaklings and say, "Now, you, pick it up!" And I would have enjoyed listening to the astonished reactions as he does so.

A heavy burden weighs down our hearts. It is a burden of "animosity, rage, and indignation." And, unfortunately, we have all too often expressed those

powerful, deep-seated emotions through "angry shouting, and abusive speech."

We see the problem. We feel the massive weight of the burden. It is sinking us. We have put our shoulders to the load. And for days, weeks, years, we have struggled. On occasion, we fantasize that the load budes an inch or two. But it does not.

It remains, burdening our hearts, ruining our lives, sapping our spirits. And then one day—will it be today?—that great Scientist-Philosopher-Engineer of the human spirit, Jesus Christ, steps aboard our little sinking bark.

"My son," He says, "My daughter." "Step away from that load. Why you've been at it so long, your shoulder is bruised and bleeding." With some display, He rigs that amazing, cruciform contraption of His—the block and tackle of His grace—above the deck of your life. And that huge and heavy burden—of animosity, rage, indignation, angry shouting, and abusive speech—lifts off your sagging spirit.

The water line drops. Your boat floats high and free. And you are ready to sail the seven seas for Jesus!

Dr. Wilson had another, powerful word for preachers in that evening lecture

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a while back. He said, "Find the Gospel in the text." And then he said, "Take the text to the Cross." I find it interesting that Paul—forgiving the anachronism—follows Dr. Wilson's good advice here, as he offers up those two positive commands.

Positive Command #1: "Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other,[and here Paul takes us to the Cross] just as God forgave all of you in Christ." Paul does indeed take us to the Cross. But does he take us to the Gospel? I want you to be kind. I want you to be tender-hearted to each other. I want you to forgive each other.

And how will you know when you've been kind enough, sufficiently tender-hearted, and offered the right kind of forgiveness? If you wonder whether or not you've been kind enough, gracious enough to that theological opponent of yours, Go, stand at the foot of the Cross. That's the platinum standard. You will not have done enough until you've done it just like that.

And having the gracious example of God-in-Christ ever before us as *the* great standard is a very good thing. Paul means to challenge us with it.

But perhaps we need to kneel there at the foot of that Old Rugged Cross a little longer. Perhaps we need to experience afresh the utter acceptance, the while-I-am-a-sinner forgiveness of God, the unconditional love, the open arms of our redeeming God. There's no way to measure up to God's blessed gift in Christ Jesus! It is beyond human comprehension!

And aren't you glad?

But I can become—by God's grace—a conduit to others of the very same grace that I have received. I can have the privilege of passing along that which has been bequeathed to me. I can share not my own kindness, for I have none, but I can share a little of the kindness, a little of the tender-heartedness, a little of the forgiveness that has already come my way in Jesus.

Bring that friend of mine—that enemy of mine!—with me to the Cross. I can put

What if victory in theological disputes were judged by the Christlike behavior of the disputants rather than the ferocity of the rhetoric?

my arm around that shoulder. Share the kindness, the tender-heartedness, and the forgiveness of Jesus with that friend, with that enemy.

“Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God forgave all of you in Christ.” Paul invites us to go to the Cross again in the second, positive command (vv. 1, 2): “So be imitators of God in the manner of beloved children (2) and live in love [and here Paul takes us to the Cross] just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

I find it fascinating that just a few verses before, Paul warns us away from mimicking the devil (Eph 4:25, 26): “So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Should you be angry, do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.”¹ Diabolos, the slanderer. Don’t make room for him, don’t be like him. Instead of slander, speak truth. Don’t mimic the devil. Instead, mimic God. Like beloved children who revere an exemplary parent, imitate God.

It may be argued that “there is no other explicit reference in either Old or New Testament to imitating God.”² I find it interesting, though, to compare Matt 5:48: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

You will remember that the gospel context invites us to be “perfect” in love, to imitate the One who “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (v. 45).

You will forgive this Adventist preacher. When I read this passage, I know that Paul is primarily directing my eyes to Calvary. But I also feel myself invited into the Sanctuary: “So be imitators of God in the manner of beloved children and live in love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

In the battle against those powerful emotions—animosity, rage, indignation—I am invited to kneel, head in hands, at the Cross, to experience afresh the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. And Paul’s language, too, evokes the atoning priesthood of Jesus and reminds me that the very real benefits of that complete sacrifice—offered so long ago—are readily available today.

Olympic Lessons

You can feel the hype in the air. The tension is as palpable as your frosty breath on the wintry, Austrian air. The year? 1964. The Event? The Olympic games at Innsbruck.

The leader board and time-keeping devices look a little different way back then, but the excitement is the same. The two-man Italian bobsled team, led by Eugenio Monti, has just completed its final run, and that Italian team is solidly in the lead. There is only one team—the British one led by Tony Nash—that seems to have any chance of beating the Italians. And just now, that team is getting into place, preparing to sprint and hop and swoosh their way down their final run.

As they position the bobsled, they make the discovery—a critical bolt on their bobsled has snapped. Without it,

they dare not make the run. Down at the bottom of the hill, Italian bobsled captain Eugenio Monti gets the news. And he might have celebrated: “Their bobsled is broken! They can’t make the run! We’re the winners!”

But not Eugenio Monti.

You see, Eugenio Monti is a sportsman—the real thing. He knows that the two bobsleds are built the same. He bends down, removes the bolt from his own bobsled and sends it up to the top of the hill.

Nash fixes the British sled and comes hurtling down the course to set a record and win the gold medal. Eugenio Monti’s accomplishment, though, must surely be judged to win the day. A touch of real class. Nobility of spirit. Respect for the opposition.

Monti becomes the very first recipient of what has become in Europe a highly celebrated honor: The Pierre de Coubertin International Fair Play Trophy. Named for the founder of the modern Olympic Games, it has been awarded annually for more than 40 years to people in sports who have demonstrated nobility of spirit. Eugenio Monti is the first.³

What if we offered the “Unruh Prize” annually to the Adventist theologian who most clearly personifies the spirit of fair play, scholarly discourse, and Christian kindness in conversations with opponents of differing opinions? How many nominations would there be? How many runners-up?

What if victory in theological disputes were judged by the Christlike behavior of the disputants rather than the ferocity of the rhetoric?

And who’s to say it isn’t?

(Endnotes)

¹ Adapted from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

² Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 353.

³ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bobsleigh_at_the_1964_Winter_Olympics.



God Is Love. by Shawn Brace

It seems like a simple statement. And yet I was challenged recently by the idea that God is, in fact, love. While having a conversation with a friend of mine who is from another faith, it suddenly dawned on me that many sincere Christians have a perverted understanding of God's character. For my friend, and many, many others, God's chief objective is to "win praise." As Reformed theologian John Piper writes, "Everything He does is motivated by His desire to be glorified." Piper goes on to admit that this idea is a hard pill to swallow in this "me-first" generation that we live in. But his explanation as to how this jibes with God's apparent love for, and interest in, humankind leaves a lot to be desired.¹

I don't know about you, but I have a hard time reconciling such an idea with what the Bible teaches. Perhaps we take it for granted sometimes, but the apostle John quite unequivocally declares that "God is love" two times in his tiny epistle (1 John 4:8, 16). *Agape* love is the very essence of His character. It is who He is, what He does, why He acts. It is His *raison d'être*. All of His movements stem from this supreme motivation and principle.

Incidentally, the idea that God is love is also one of the best arguments for the doctrine of the Trinity. If God's very essence is love—and love necessarily has to have another in order for it to be love, since love is other-centered and not self-centered—then there had to have been more than One person from eternity past. As Skip MacCarty writes, in his magnificent work on the Everlasting Covenant:

Before creation existed, God existed, love existed, covenant existed—

everlasting God, everlasting love, everlasting covenant. This everlasting covenant expresses the heart of the everlasting God manifested in the sacrificial love that existed among the Trinity before the beginning of time. The term "everlasting covenant" can never be invoked without calling to mind the love bonds that existed from eternity past within the divine, triune heavenly council, each seeking the happiness of the other.²

Proverbs seems to give us a small glimpse into this symbiotic relationship that the Trinity enjoys. Describing the relationship between Wisdom—which Jesus ultimately personifies³—and the Father, we read of the creation account, "I [Christ] was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him" (Proverbs 8:30).⁴ With love as their very essence, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always acted with complete other-centeredness towards one another, and They have enjoyed infinite fellowship from eternity past.

I can only imagine the heavenly counsel that took place when the plan of salvation was first discussed. Knowing that humankind would sin, I can see the Father volunteering to give up His life for the world, only to have the Holy Spirit insist that He would be the one to die in our place. And then, finally, Jesus, the Son, steps forward and says, "No, I will die instead of You two. I will give My life for the world." Each wanted to die in place of the other, and thus, when Hebrews 2:9 tells us that Christ tasted death "for all," Christ didn't just die for humankind, but He died for the other two members of the Trinity as well.⁵ Out of complete self-disinterest and

love for the Father and Holy Spirit, Jesus was allowed the opportunity to die in Their place, and ours as well.

And this is what love is. And this is who God is. Completely other-centered. Completely self-sacrificial.

Completely the God I want to serve.

(Endnotes)

¹ See John Piper, "Is God for Us or for Himself?" *Desiring God*, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/3_The_Glory_of_God/242_Is_God_for_Us_or_for_Himself/ (accessed 11 Sept 2008). Piper has coined the curious phrase "Christian Hedonism," which seems to be an extreme contradiction of terms.

² Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained?* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2007), 5, 6.

³ See 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30.

⁴ All scriptures, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *New King James Version*.

⁵ The Greek phrase in Heb 2:9, *hyper pantos*, does not have to limit Christ's sacrifice to only human beings. It does not say that He tasted death "for all men," but simply, "for all," or "for everyone." Compare this to Col 1:20, where Paul says that Christ "reconciled all things to Himself . . . whether things on earth or things *in heaven*, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Evidently, Christ's death on the cross reconciled, not only humankind to Himself, but the whole universe, including the other members of the Trinity (to some extent). Thus, Ellen White can write that God loved Jesus more and that Jesus was "endeared to [His] Father," as a result of His sacrifice. See *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1940), 483.

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